



# MCHAS Cares About Training

*Three-part training strategy ensures that users are competent, comfortable, and satisfied with Marine Corps Housing Automated System.*

Devising a training concept is a perennial challenge for program managers, users, and designers—everyone involved in the development of automated software-based systems. The team that developed the Marine Corps Housing Automated System (MCHAS), which will be used by USMC Family Housing offices, has demonstrated an innovative new approach to training that avoids the pitfalls so often encountered in the development of training programs. Based on less-than-satisfactory results achieved by several similar programs, Marine Corps officials recognized that training should be a critical element of the MCHAS development.

From the start of the MCHAS effort in October 1999, the Marine Corps customers emphasized the importance of planning and budgeting for training. For the system work, the team employed a deliberate three-part strategy that emphasized user involvement, development, and training. The approach was important not only to ensure that the users would be competent with MCHAS, but also to create a sense of comfort with the system that would increase users' satisfaction with the new software.

The process of creating a comfortable environment for users started with the beginning of system development in October 1999. The MCHAS team hosted the first of four user's workshops, which were attended by personnel from all 13

USMC Family Housing offices.

At the first workshop, the attendees defined the functionality and workflow of the system, made suggestions on the appearance of the MCHAS graphical interface, and voted on the name of the system. The progress achieved at this initial workshop generated excitement about MCHAS among users and gave them a feeling of ownership of the system.

The team continued the workshops throughout the development of the system. The discussions focused on system improvements, such as workflow, and the introduction of new functions and reporting tools.

The team determined that while users generally were comfortable and enthusiastic about MCHAS, they required a new approach to training that would be more effective than the usual "point here, click this, type that" approach widely relied upon for training for software-based systems.

With the endorsement of Marine Corps officials, the team invested in the development of a MCHAS user's training curriculum. The curriculum, which was produced by a certified trainer, avoided the problems that often result from allowing the system software developers to also produce the entire curriculum themselves (although the developers did play a significant role in developing the curriculum).

The curriculum development team

held several meetings to review curriculum content and to answer technical questions. When the work was completed—after a six-month process—the MCHAS team received a training manual that not only explained the system module by module, but also provided exercises and problem sets that users could work through independently to fully understand the capabilities of the system. The MCHAS team also obtained a professional presentation package for use by instructors during the hands-on training classes.

During FY 2002, the team presented two highly successful MCHAS User's Training Classes, one held at Port Hueneme, Calif., and the second at Cherry Point, N.C. Attendees received their very own copy of the training curriculum and left with a thorough understanding of the MCHAS system.

The Marine Corps plans to continue the MCHAS training effort in FY 2003, with two more users' classes and a fifth users' workshop now scheduled. The team expects these classes to be as successful as the first two and the workshop as lively and productive as the first four as the Corps moves toward fielding a new Web-based application of the system. ■